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AUTHOR Kirkland, Angela G.; Redfield, Doris L.
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ABSTRACT

To assess depression in college students, two inventories were compared: the Student Experience Inventory (SEI) and the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI). SEI, a self-report questionnaire, contains 56 items that are designed to measure hopelessness and decreased energy levels, as well as five factors covered in BDI: (1) negative affect toward self, (2) negative physiological symptoms, (3) general unhappiness, (4) performance difficulties, and (5) loss of personal and social interest. Unlike BDI, SEI is worded to reflect specific, common college experiences, as well as the duality of phenomena (e.g., physiological reactions). SEI uses a counterbalancing of items to lessen the probability of response bias. Items within the SEI were analyzed using item-total correlations. The four items with the highest item-total correlations within each of seven subdomains were selected for inclusion in the SEI. Coefficient alpha was also computed to assess internal consistency, and a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess concurrent validity. The SEI appeared to measure a construct similar but not identical to the construct measured by BDI. The results suggest that further development of SEI may allow for the assessment of those aspects of depression specific to the college population. The SEI is appended. (SW)

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Depression in College Students

Student Experience Inventory

Angela G. Kirkland and Doris L. Redfield

Western Kentucky University

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Depression in College Students: Student Experience Inventory

Recent research (Thompson & Kirkland, 1984) suggests that between 15 and 20 percent of undergraduate college students suffer from the symptoms of mild to moderate depression. Although depression is prevalent among college students, there are no known depression indices especially designed for this population. An inventory frequently employed to assess general depression is the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock, & Erbaugh, 1961).

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) assesses a multidimensional view of depression. Beck incorporates the following five components in his inventory: (1) negative affect toward self, (2) negative physiological symptoms, (3) general unhappiness, (4) performance difficulties, and (5) loss of personal and social interest. One reason for the popularity of the BDI is its acclaimed reliability and validity. However, despite its advantages, the BDI presents several concerns. One concern is that although the component factors measured by the BDI are considered to support a multidimensional view of depression, not all relevant domains of depression are sampled (e.g. feelings of hopelessness and decreased energy). A second concern is that the BDI does not recognize the nuances of the college setting which may influence the assessment of the college population. Finally, Beck disregards the duality of certain physiological reactions. For example, one item on the measure assesses the decrease in sleep. While some depressed individuals experience a decrease in sleep, an equal number report excessive sleeping when depressed.

The instrument described in this paper, i.e., the Student Experience Inventory (SEI) incorporates items: (1) designed to measure hopelessness and decreased energy levels, as well as items reflecting the five factors of the BDI, (2) worded to reflect specific, common college experiences, and (3) reflecting the duality of phenomenon, e.g., physiological reactions.

The SEI, which appears in Appendix A, is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 56 items, utilizing Likert scaling. Responses to each item may be selected from five distractors ranging from very characteristic of me to very uncharacteristic of me. A self-report questionnaire in a Likert format is selected because of its convenience and its ability to assess covert qualities of depression. The BDI contains four distractors per item indicating severity of depression. The first item distractor in the series of four always represents minimal; the fourth item in the series always represents maximal depression. The SEI, however, utilizes a counterbalancing of items so that the first item distractor in the series does not always represent minimal or maximal depression. The purpose of this counterbalancing is to lessen the probability of response bias.

Method

Participants

The participants were 62 college students enrolled in two sections of Introduction to Psychology at Western Kentucky University. Upon entering the classroom, each participant was asked to complete the BDI and SEI. Presentation order of the instruments was counterbalanced.

Procedure

The SEI was designed by generating 8 items from each of the following

domains: (1) negative affect toward self, (2) negative physiological symptoms, (3) general unhappiness, (4) performance difficulties, (5) loss of personal and social pleasure, (6) loss of energy, and (7) hopelessness. The pool of items was reviewed by three professional staff members of the Western Kentucky University Counseling Services Center considered knowledgeable in the area of depression. Items were then examined by three individuals within the target population to judge the clarity of components. Utilizing this feedback, items were either disgarded or revised. The final draft was again reviewed by the three staff members to insure agreement on the adequacy of the domain sampling.

Questionnaire items were scaled by employing a variation of the Likert procedure. Response alternatives were assigned letters ranging from A to E which corresponded to the following descriptors: (A) very characteristic of me, (B) characteristic of me, (C) neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic, (D) uncharacteristic of me, and (E) very uncharacteristic of me. Each of the five scale anchors is assumed to divide the variable into five classes, ordered with respect to the presence of the construct. Letters, as opposed to numbers, were chosen to emphasize the qualitative rather than quantitative value of the items. In scoring items, values ranging from 4 to 0 were assigned to each respective letter A to E. In the case of statements indicating the absence of depression, scoring was reversed.

Analysis of Items

Items within the SEI were analyzed by means of item-total correlations to determine the degree of relationship between each item and the construct measured by the SEI. The four items with the highest item-total correlations within each of the seven forementioned subdomains were selected for inclusion;

the remaining items were deleted from the SEI. Four items per domain for the final version of the SEI were chosen in order to maintain the highest degree of reliability, while also maintaining the least number of items. Coefficient alpha was also computed to assess internal consistency of the SEI and for each of the seven subdomains. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the concurrent validity of the SEI total score with the BDI total score.

Results

The item-total correlations for the original 56 items contained within the SEI, are shown in Table 1. Item-total correlations ranged from -.06 to .68. Coefficient alpha for the total scale was .90. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for the SEI and BDI was .85.

Insert Table 1 about here

A second item analysis was conducted after deleting all but the four items per subdomain having the highest item-total correlations. Results of this second analysis are presented in Table 2. Item-total correlations ranged from .28 to .68. Coefficient alpha for the total score was .91. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for the BDI scores and adjusted SEI total scores was .80. SEI items maintained in the revised instrument are noted in Appendix A.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that further development of the SEI may allow for the assessment of those aspects of depression specific to the college population. Although the BDI and SEI appear to measure similar subdomains, the decreased correlation between the BDI and revised SEI implies that the SEI measures a construct similar, but not identical, to the construct measured by the BDI. Definitive conclusions regarding the usefulness of the SEI require further investigation of its psychometric properties. Ongoing research is designed to cross-validate the SEI and study its construct validity.

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Table 1

Item - total Correlations

Item	r	Item	r
1	.484	29	.252
2	.674	30	.178
3	.352	31	.046
4	.099	32	-.061
5	.404	33	.233
6	.467	34	.220
7	.406	35	.516
8	.153	36	.612
9	.447	37	.387
10	.381	38	.105
11	.159	39	.424
12	.252	40	.575
13	.501	41	.312
14	.405	42	.142
15	.493	43	.255
16	.093	44	.275
17	.118	45	.201
18	.411	46	.427
19	.321	47	.386
20	.445	48	.505
21	.239	49	.370
22	.456	50	.432
23	.175.	51	.439
24	.314	52	.536
25	.587	53	.421
26	.426	54	.681
27	.391	55	.372
28	.551	56	.212

Table 2
Selected Item-total Correlations

Item	r
1	.454
2	.650
3	.394
5	.435
6	.477
7	.426
9	.452
13	.487
14	.403
15	.520
18	.490
20	.485
22	.462
25	.636
26	.334
28	.580
35	.486
36	.618
37	.352
39	.450
40	.571
41	.283
46	.361
47	.377
48	.504
51	.441
52	.568
54	.675

Appendix A

Student Experience Inventory (SEI)

Response Key: (A) very characteristic of me, (B) characteristic of me, (C) neither characteristic nor uncharacteristic, (D) uncharacteristic of me, (E) very uncharacteristic of me.

* 1. Sometimes I doubt whether students or teachers I'm talking to are really interested in what I am saying. A B C D E
* 2. I have vivid unhappy dreams which disturb me while asleep. A B C D E
* 3. In college I reach the goals I set for myself almost all the time. A B C D E
4. Small things sometimes "get on my nerves" even though I realize they are trivial. A B C D E
* 5. I have been let down by my friends. A B C D E
* 6. I can find enough energy most of the time to face the demands of college. A B C D E
* 7. It seems I will never catch up in my classwork. A B C D E
* 8. I am easily awakened by noise in my room. A B C D E
* 9. I can't seem to concentrate in class. A B C D E
10. I usually feel my college life is worthwhile. A B C D E
11. I enjoy a frequent night out. A B C D E
12. Many mornings I just can't seem to get up and go to class. A B C D E
*13. No matter how hard I try I will never improve my grades. A B C D E
*14. My appetite is the same as usual. A B C D E
*15. I get tense when I think of all the classwork lying ahead of me. A B C D E
16. I don't seem to care what happens to me in college. A B C D E
17. I would hate to be where there wouldn't be a lot of people to talk to. A B C D E
*18. I have had days or weeks when I couldn't do my classwork because I couldn't "get going." A B C D E
19. To be safe and prepared for the worst is better than being optimistic, always anticipating success. A B C D E
*20. My stomach is often nervous and tied up in knots. A B C D E
21. I am about as able to work as ever. A B C D E
*22. I am happy in school a great deal of the time. A B C D E
23. I go to parties only when I have to and stay away any other time. A B C D E
24. I have often lost out on things because I just couldn't make up my mind soon enough. A B C D E
*25. I am not lucky enough to be successful in college. A B C D E
*26. My sleep is fitful and disturbed. A B C D E
27. I find it hard to keep my mind on my homework. A B C D E
*28. I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be. A B C D E
29. I am most happy when I am alone. A B C D E
30. Most of the time I am full of energy. A B C D E

31. My life is never the same from day to day, always changing. A B C D E
32. My interest in sex has neither increased nor decreased. A B C D E
33. I work under a great deal of tension. A B C D E
34. I cry easily. A B C D E
*35. Parties aren't as fun as they used to be. A B C D E
*36. When studying, I can't seem to understand what I've read as well as I used to. A B C D E
*37. I Feel that my future is hopeless and will never improve. A B C D E
38. I am neither gaining nor losing weight. A B C D E
*39. I have difficulty in starting to study for an exam. A B C D E
*40. I brood a great deal. A B C D E
*41. I find most of my classes enjoyable. A B C D E
42. It is rare for me to miss any of my classes. A B C D E
43. I feel my present situation will never change. A B C D E
44. I sleep the same amount as I usually have. A B C D E
45. I can study carefully on most things without people bothering me by making noise. A B C D E
*46. Most of the time I am not in the mood to see anyone. A B C D E
*47. My daily life is full of things that keep me interested. A B C D E
*48. My memory on tests is as good as it ever was. A B C D E
49. In the future things will get better and better. A B C D E
50. I find myself upset rather than helped by the kind of criticism professors or friends may offer. A B C D E
*51. I am only half successful in college. A B C D E
*52. I am always self-confident about my abilities to succeed in college. A B C D E
53. I seem to be about as capable and smart as most people. A B C D E
*54. Lately I feel rather useless at times. A B C D E
55. Most nights I go to sleep without thoughts bothering me. A B C D E
56. I have fewer friends than most people. A B C D E

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* maintained on the revised SEI

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